

# Marketing Theory

<http://mtq.sagepub.com/>

---

## **Identity, consumption and narratives of socialization**

Avi Shankar, Richard Elliott and James A. Fitchett

*Marketing Theory* 2009 9: 75

DOI: 10.1177/1470593108100062

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://mtq.sagepub.com/content/9/1/75>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

**Additional services and information for *Marketing Theory* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://mtq.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://mtq.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://mtq.sagepub.com/content/9/1/75.refs.html>



# Identity, consumption and narratives of socialization

Avi Shankar

School of Management, University of Bath, UK

Richard Elliott

School of Management, University of Bath, UK

James A. Fitchett

University of Leicester, UK

**Abstract.** *In this paper we contribute to current debates concerning the relationship between identity and consumption. We use people's past consumption of music, embodied in their old records, as an archive of their identity projects. Using a narrative approach to data collection and drawing on an interpretive orientation influenced by the work of Pierre Bourdieu, we find that the structuring influences that enable and constrain the development of identity emerge in sharper relief. In particular, we suggest that narratives of socialization have an enduring effect on how people 'make up' who they want to be. Implications for consumer research theory are discussed. **Key Words** ● consumption ● identity ● materiality ● music ● narrative ● possessions*

## Introduction

The relationship between identity and consumption has been a topic of much debate across the social sciences. Within marketing and consumer research a view has emerged that suggests it is through consumption that people are empowered to 'make up' their identity, or who they want to be. Accordingly, and consistent with the premise of this journal, in this paper we engage in a spot of critical reflexivity and argue for a modest modification to this increasingly axiomatic marketing maxim.



In order to achieve this, we consider how people's identities develop across time – reflected and represented in and through past consumption practices. This de facto longitudinal approach is in contrast to most, if not all, studies that tend to be cross sectional in nature and ask how consumption helps people to construct their identity. At first glance, this difference may appear to be a touch trivial and tautological. However, our contention is that because consumer researchers' theoretical and analytical focus is, quite understandably, consumption, this has resulted in an overemphasis on the importance of consumption to identity development. A symbolic, self-expressivist, communicative account (Warde, 2005) of this relationship has thus emerged, and whilst this has been fruitful and is appealing in many regards, we suggest it offers a lop-sided account. Therefore, in our research we have made the concept of identity our focus and have used consumption merely as a context through which to study its development. This minor change in emphasis, and the narrative approach adopted in this paper, enable us to illustrate the tensions that exist between people's ability to make up their identities through the choices that they make, and the constraints on their ability to do so. In particular we identify what we call narratives of socialization as having an enduring effect on agency.

Our paper is structured as follows. First, we offer a succinct synthesis of the key theoretical issues underpinning identity and its relationship to consumption. We then advocate the utility of old records as projective materials that enable us to situate and explore the development of identity over time. Before presenting our data we outline the narrative perspective and the interpretive orientation that infuses our research. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our research for consumer research theory more generally.

## Identity and consumption

Once upon a time, as Kellner (1992: 141) wryly observed, identity was an unproblematic concept: 'one's identity was fixed, solid and stable . . . One was a hunter, a member of a tribe and that was that'. He further contends that identity 'was a function of predefined social roles . . . which provided orientation and religious sanction to one's place in the world'. And so it remained and, no doubt, still does for millions around the globe who do not live in advanced industrialized societies.

Over the past thirty or so years, the social sciences have seen a veritable explosion of interest in the concept of identity with prior essentialist perspectives rendered problematic by developments in what has now become post-structural theory (e.g. Bauman, 2001; Foucault, 1982). In this view, identity is no longer thought of as a unitary, fixed or stable construct, rather identities are dynamic and have to be assembled and reassembled, produced and reproduced. The worlds that we now inhabit are replete with competing representations of who we can be, or possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986), with the identities that we reproduce negotiated in relation to these representations (Hall, 1996). Identity is no longer conceptualized as a 'thing'; rather it is considered a project, a process and a prac-



tice, which has to be worked on – or reflexively monitored, organized and managed (Giddens, 1991).

It is argued that in contemporary culture – post-modernity – with the erosion of traditional and historical forms of identity, people avoid a potential existential crisis by actively constructing, maintaining and communicating their identity partly by using the symbolic meaning of brands, leisure and lifestyle pursuits (see e.g. Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Consumer culture is thus considered to be a pre-eminent arena for the production and circulation of competing, discursive representations or identity positions, with consumption the means through which the symbolic potential of these identity positions is incorporated, reproduced and realized into the extended self and into ongoing identity projects (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988). In this view then, people, now freed from the structural constraints that once determined their identity, are empowered to ‘make up’ whom they wish to be through an assortment of choices facilitated through the marketplace (e.g. Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). This symbolic, self-expressivist, communicative account of identity through consumption is appealing in many regards but it tends to over individualize consumption and, as a consequence, ascribes people, when acting as consumers, with (too much) agency. Our focus is on understanding the relationship between identity and consumption as a process and practice through which identities are selected, validated and reinforced and thus we locate its development within a social world, subject to historical forces (see e.g. Warde, 2005).

## **Exploring identity and consumption through music**

Given the dynamic view of identity that we are sketching out, the challenge that faced us was to identify a suitable consumption context through which to explore and examine these processes. Numerous studies have demonstrated that possessions symbolize issues of identity (e.g. Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992), but as people progress through the stages of their lives, as their identities develop and change, many, if not most, of their possessions come and go as a result. Through use and over time possessions get worn out, or outgrown, or are simply ‘not me’ anymore.

Unlike other possessions that come and go, we identified records and CDs as a suitable site through which to explore the processes of identity formation and development. The highly symbolic nature of music means its consumption represents an ideal site through which to examine the development of identity. Simon Frith (1996a: 110), the world-renowned sociologist of rock, argues that ‘music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective’. From the perspective of the individual, listening to music performs a number of functions including the management of self-identity, interpersonal relationships, and mood (Hargreaves and North, 1999). For example, the consumption of music, and especially love songs, offer people ‘the romantic terms to articulate and so experience their emotions’ (Frith,



1988: 123); they provide people with a ready made narrative to enable them to give meaning to their emotions of love, 'to place ourselves within imaginative cultural narratives' (Frith, 1996b: 275). Music in this sense is a Foucauldian technology of self, enabling 'emotional work' and the care of the self to be carried out (De Nora, 1999: 37). At the social level, the music that people like, the bands that they see perform live and the records that they buy symbolize the social groups that they belong to and, in so doing, those groups that they reject or do not want to belong to (Bourdieu, 1984).

Consequently we suggest that a person's past consumption of popular music, embodied and represented in his or her records, is a site through which to examine the historical and social dynamics of identity. Our participants were selected because they had kept many, but inevitably not all, of their records since their childhood. Now, well into their forties, these records represent a document of their lives (Plummer, 2001), a significant, albeit partial archive of their identity projects. We accept that records can never be a complete representation of these processes but they are the most complete ones our participants had, and therefore we had access to. We used these records then as 'a personal archive' (Belk, 1988: 159) that enabled our participants to 'spin a biographical thread of self-remembrance' (De Nora, 1999: 31). Old records, therefore, enabled us to shed light onto the processes and practices of identity development, acting as durable objects that allowed past identities to be recovered and reflected upon, recomposed and told (Arendt, 1998[1958]).

The records studied are thus conceptualized as symbolic representations of past lives and past selves (Hill, 1991). Their examination facilitates the 'cultural construction of subjectivity' (De Nora, 1999: 54) or the tensions that exist between the ongoing, identity-in-process at the individual level and the social and cultural processes that simultaneously enable and constrain identity projects. We use the word tension deliberately as this signifies two interrelated points. First, when an identity, say masculinity, is seen as a discursive construct then different circulating and perhaps competing discourses (historically and culturally) will represent masculinity in alternative ways (see e.g. Holt and Thompson, 2004). Second, the ability to choose an identity is a negotiation. For example, a young man reading the latest copy of *Men's Health* may interpret masculinity as constructed and represented in terms of 'having a six-pack' but his ability to reproduce this version of masculinity has to be initially accepted and then literally worked on – a double negotiation – if he so chooses.

Moreover, as the reproduction of an existing identity and its incorporation into ongoing identity projects is also a social act, people must gain recognition from others to assume a valid and recognized identity (Jenkins, 1996; Thompson and Hirschman, 1995) – 'your abs look great' – but this validation has the potential to be a source of anxiety and potential misery – 'call *that* a six pack'. Choosing a particular identity can thus be a double-edged sword; it can appear to be an outward manifestation of a person's agency yet equally choice has the potential to be chaotic and paralysing and accompanied by, 'anguish, abandonment and despair' (Sartre, 1948: 30).



To sum up, consumer culture can be represented as a smorgasbord of symbolic resources that people interact with, deliberately or not, to (re)produce their identities. Consumer research has tended towards an affirmative postmodern reading that suggests this process has the potential to be empowering and liberating (see for example Goulding et al., 2002). However, a more pessimistic postmodern reading would suggest that endless choice could equally be chaotic, paralysing and potentially disempowering. In practice, such a polarization, while theoretically compelling, is not particularly evident. Rather, we find within the consumer identity projects stream of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT), people adopting a myriad of tactics and coping strategies to maintain a coherent identity (see Ahuvia, 2005; Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In keeping with CCT, our approach towards understanding the process of identification recognizes the agency that people can employ in reproducing various identities, and an understanding that the identities that people reproduce are made available through particular historical and social contexts. To paraphrase Marx: although we may make our own history, we do not do so in circumstances of our own choosing but from circumstances transmitted from the past.

## **Method**

We pursued a narrative approach to data collection that assumes telling and/ or writing stories has ontological status. This means that the process of telling stories is an act of creation and construction and not simply an act of remembering or retelling. In this view, the goal of the researcher is to help the participant in this process and consequently we encouraged our participants to reflect on their old records, play and listen to them again and then discuss these reflections with the researcher (see e.g. Shankar et al., 2001).

A convenience sample of twelve people was approached to take part in this research – the main criterion for selection simply being that they still had their old records. There were two stages of data collection. The first stage consisted of the participants reminding themselves of their old records on their own and in their own time. They were instructed to put their records into piles that made meaningful sense to them and to record their ‘stream of consciousness’ thoughts and feelings into a dictaphone as they went through this process. As many of our potential participants had hundreds of records this process proved very time intensive. As a result only four successfully completed this process – two men and two women. The tapes were transcribed and emergent themes related to issues of identity, from a preliminary within case analysis of these scripts, were incorporated into the second phase of data collection. This involved an in-depth interview that combined elements of McCracken’s (1988) long interview and Atkinson’s (1998) life story interview, and was conducted in the home of each participant. The highly personal nature of the research could potentially mean that establishing rapport may have been a potential problem. As advocated by Shankar et al.



(2001) this was negated through convenience sampling friends with whom trust, empathy and a shared past already existed.

Records are thus ‘interpretive materials’ that have the ability to illuminate lives. The task of the interview was to produce ‘detailed inscriptions’ (Denzin, 1998) of the life experiences of our participants that were rekindled through reflecting on their records. However, from the narrative perspective adopted, it is also assumed that the stories that people tell do not emerge out of the ether, they ‘come’ from somewhere, and it is these ‘somewheres’ that represent the ‘circumstances transmitted from the past’ that we are interested in.

## Interpretive orientation

Our focus in this paper is to understand the tensions between choosing an identity and the different factors that shape and constrain people’s ability to make these choices. In order to achieve this, we draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977). In keeping with most eminent sociologists, Bourdieu went to considerable lengths to resist polarizing these tensions as either structural determinism on the one hand, or existential determinism on the other. He achieved this by developing concepts ‘to think with’ including the logic of practice and the art of necessary improvisation. Like Bourdieu (1985), who claimed his concepts by their very nature were flexible rather than static, we too adapt his thinking tools in light of our empirical work.

Through a narrative lens, Bourdieu’s concepts translate into our research in the following manner. We are all socialized into the world partly through the narratives of our family, class and culture. These stories provide us with archetypal ways of being and doing and, in our case, archetypal identities; they are models, if you like, of how to be in the world, of who we are, and of who we possibly can be. But these remain theoretical constructs until they are reproduced in practice by people actually being and doing. This happens across time and space and for Bourdieu not, or at least not completely, consciously. And in reproducing the identities into which we are socialized, we are reproducing the way things are, or at least the way things appear to be: they have a practical logic. This means that for most people, for most of the time, they take for granted the conditions of their existence and their concomitant identities. For example, most people unproblematically reproduce the gendered nature of their identities, with this process starting as soon as they enter the world when they are assigned a gendered name. Equally, for the people in this study, they reproduced their sexual identity as ‘the way it is’ – all are heterosexual.

However, against this structuralist view of the unchanging nature of practical logic, Bourdieu also argues for the art of necessary improvisation. In this view we strategize in light of our own experiences, goals, interests and social circumstances. From our narrative perspective this suggests that some people may well modify or rewrite their socialization narratives or reinterpret the characters that have been written for them. Improvisation and strategizing in the logic of practice are thus



conceptual tools used by Bourdieu to escape, or at least elide, the structure/agency debate. In the sections that follow, we present some extracts from the consumption stories of our participants that draw on this interpretive orientation to highlight these processes and thus shed light on factors that can constrain our ability to choose who we want to be.

### 'I'm a believer'

In the following extract from Helen's story we see her recounting her choice to 'become' a Christian during her teenage years. Helen's U2 records symbolize this Christian self and, before they became global superstars, U2 were much more open about the religious connotations associated with their music:

The album that was *the* album was U2's *October* and I also really loved *Boy*. The person who introduced me to this was David, but it kind of fitted in with the Christianity thing and all the kind of folk stuff of that phase . . . my new Christian thing, rather than my traditional church Christian thing. I played this and I played it and I played it and I loved it. I think *Tomorrow* is my favourite.

When interviewed this difference between her 'new' and 'traditional' Christian identity was explored:

I basically always went to church and always believed and when I was about 16, I started hanging out more with the girls from school rather than local friends, and they were really into the Methodist sort of thing . . . and then . . . I went announcing to everybody that I was a Christian!

Did you?

I remember . . . we were sitting at dinner and I suddenly said to my mum – I've become a Christian! My mum was like – 'What are you talking about?'

You didn't feel as though you had always been a Christian?

She did. She didn't understand what I was on about! I did, but I didn't feel that I had actively done it. I'd just done it, because that was just part of my life, but this was like a real positive choice.

This extract demonstrates Helen's self-in-process (Frith, 1996a), the acknowledgment, acceptance, assimilation and subsequent cultivation of an identity into her ongoing identity project. Helen was socialized by her parents, schooling and more broadly by her cultural environment (England in the 1960s and 1970s) as a Christian. She (as many people do) accepted these family and cultural narratives as 'the way it is' – a practical logic – and reproduced a Christian identity, without thinking, by participating in religious social and cultural practices like going to church at Easter or Christmas. However, rather than passively performing and re-articulating these family and cultural narratives, Helen made a choice to openly declare her faith and actively invested into the identity of being a Christian, partly through the consumption of music and, in light of her own life experiences, updated her narrative trajectory.





## 'I should be so lucky'

Choosing who we want to be can have positive and negative outcomes. By and large Helen's choice was a positive one. For some though, wanting to be someone is not as simple or straightforward and can become disempowering. The following extract is taken from Sophie's story. At the time that she recorded her self-interview (the first phase of the research), Sophie was not plagued by insecurities over her body image. Finding her old aerobic routine record reminded her of a past self. Note the imago that she creates (i.e. the characterization she uses to describe her past self when telling her story), resonant of a victim, written from the perspective of a survivor:

Right this is *Kay Cornelius's Aerobic Workout* . . . It reminds me of serious pain of doing this record, which I did do a lot in a desperate attempt to be that slim person that I wanted to be. There was so much pressure to be thin and what you looked like was so important, fashion and your size. I had a constant battle with weight . . . and put on a lot of weight when I was at university . . . because I ate so badly . . . One day I'd binge on a loaf of bread and the next day I'd do this record 4 times. Wasn't helped with my friend who used to do the same thing. And luckily I've pulled through it and it's not a problem now, but I do think that the media around you, your friends, it was a big thing and people I know did get eating disorders . . . it's scary the outside pressure there is to look a certain way. So it's a bit of a joke one really, but I put this in just because it was very important to me at the time, what I looked like and it made me unhappy when I felt fat.

Sophie's story shows the importance of discourses about the self to the construction of the self, in particular the media's idealized representations of beauty that construct femininity in a certain way. Sophie's inability to reproduce this version of beauty, however, was a source of anxiety and despair. Sophie's pain can be understood as a symbolic representation of power, the internalization of culturally produced idealized images of beauty and the 'normalizing power of those norms' (Bordo, 1997: 451). This suggests that women can never quite inhabit the ideal that they feel compelled to approximate but, in trying to, unknowingly reproduce gender-based hierarchies of power (Butler, 1990; Coward, 1997). In this instance, Sophie's attempts at strategizing and improvising were ineffective.

## 'Do anything you wanna do'

Some of the identities that people reproduce over the course of their lifetime are assigned or given to them by others. Some children have little choice in being associated with a particular school that their parents have chosen for them, and that may have social implications that they are unaware of. Attending one school rather than another may only symbolize something within local, geographically bound communities. This was not the case with Peter. He attended one of *the* most prestigious schools in the UK. Peter's school, which he attended between the ages of 13 and 18 during the late 1970s and early 1980s, is popularly perceived to be a bastion of the British class system and the British establishment and is symbolic of both high economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984). Like many of the identities that are assigned to people by others (offensive racial identities, for example), the



identity of a public school boy has a pejorative aspect to it. For Peter this was exacerbated because of the particular public school that he attended. Peter negotiated that he had become aware that others were assigning him the identity of a posh, public schoolboy by resisting this image; he tried within his means, and in a limited way, to restrict his reproduction of this identity. And he did this by actively investing in an alternative identity – he tried to become a Punk. Ahuvia (2005) describes this type of strategy as a demarcating strategy, endorsing one identity whilst rejecting another:

I saw the Ramones in 1978 – the first concert I went to. I saw The Clash, I never saw the [Sex] Pistols. I saw The Jam, Eddie and the Hot Rods . . .

When you went to these places were you self-conscious that you were a posh public schoolboy?

Definitely. I remember The Ramones, I was blown away, just petrified by the whole experience. You thought you were hard and then suddenly you walked in – it was The Electric Ballroom in Camden – and these were real people. They weren't some stuck up little prick who's put some gel in his hair.

Do you think people would have seen through your thin veneer?

Yes . . . if they'd been bothered with us . . . a 14-year-old, just another spotty Herbert<sup>1</sup> aren't you?

This suggests recognition by Peter of a degree of inauthenticity to the character he was trying to be – the ineffective reproduction of a desired identity. He knew he wasn't a real Punk, he was an outsider, but it still felt very good. Trying to be a Punk requires social reinforcement from other Punks – real Punks. Paul was exhibiting Sartre's (2000) notion of Bad Faith; he was trying to be something that he knew, or at least knows now, he could never really be. Peter is well aware of the irony of his position. Part of Punk's appeal lies in its anti-establishment sentiments (Hebdige, 1979) and here he was attending a school that was, and still is, perceived to be a cornerstone of that establishment. By associating himself with these sentiments, Peter was expressing resistance to and of the rigid social system into which he was being socialized. The character of a Punk represented the antithesis of these values.

But what function did being a Punk public schoolboy serve him then, while he was at school actually being this character, a character that he seems rather amused by now? Peter did not need social reinforcement from real Punks, as he was receiving it at school where this character was really being played out. Being a Punk was a badge of identity for his peer group, marking them out as different from the other schoolboys they were at boarding school with:

Can you describe to me . . . this public schoolboy Peter, who's suddenly buying lots of music and going to lots of concerts . . . what sort of person were you like at the time?

I wanted to be different.

From whom?

From the majority of the tossers<sup>2</sup> I was at school with. They weren't people who I particularly liked at the time. I had a great time at school because of 8, 10, maximum 20 people. The rest of them, in my opinion, were a pretty terrible bunch.



We're in this world, you're buying music, you want to be different from the people there because . . . ?

I didn't like them, I didn't like their . . . I wouldn't have seen it at that time . . . but it was their snobbery . . . you go to this place and you hear people talking about whatever they are talking about in a derogatory fashion because of the colour of their skin, or because of where they were born, or the way they spoke . . . they were thinking just like their mummies and daddies were telling them to, and I used to hate it.

Do you think disliking some of the people . . . was actually an important part of the whole experience?

Yes. It was important because it made you try and establish yourself in ways that were different from them . . . you're wearing DMs<sup>3</sup> and then because of the musical influence, you are trying to be rebellious and you're seeing big brother's been to see Eddie and the Hotrods so he's recorded that. Then suddenly you don't want to be wearing your grey flannels with the turn-ups, you want to see if you can get trousers like this [drainpipes], and you're wearing . . . I stole some shirts off my father . . . I'm wearing a curtain ring in my ear. A lot of that was done, not just because of what you're reading or listening to, but also you could see that . . . that some of the other people there hated it.

For Peter the process of trying to be who he wanted to be was also a process of trying not to be who he didn't want to be. This identity was reinforced through his peer group. They competitively demonstrated their knowledge of current musical trends, read the music press, listened to 'cool' radio programmes like John Peel's. As Peter describes, 'we were trying to score points off each other . . . buying records that no one else had heard'. This is what Thornton (1995) describes as subcultural capital, or in this instance, with-in group capital, a form of status seeking and currency, being seen to be 'in the know'. These observations support Frith's (1996a: 111, emphasis in the original) point that social groups 'get to know themselves as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through *cultural* activity'. Peter and his friends actively cultivated an image through music and fashion and their activities even provoked fear and disgust in those they were differentiating themselves from (Wilk, 1997). This is consistent with Bourdieu (1984: 56), who comments that 'tastes (i.e. manifested preferences) are the practical manifestation of an inevitable difference . . . tastes . . . are distastes, disgust provoked by horror or visceral intolerance ("sick-making") of the tastes of others'. However, while Bourdieu was particularly referring to tastes between classes, what we have an example of here is a matter of taste within the same class. The implication is that the other schoolboys were horrified with Peter and his close friends that they were being Punks and exhibiting tastes that they did not associate with members of their own class; tastes moreover that seemed to be 'working class' tastes. For Peter and his friends it was the perfect strategy by which to differentiate themselves from all those 'tossers'. Peter, too, expresses disgust for their tastes (Wilk, 1997).

In addition to consuming the appropriate music, attachment to a Punk identity or character involved Peter playing with his accent and modifying his dress. And importantly, his close-knit peer group, all behaving and acting in the same way, provided each other with the social reinforcement of this difference. Punk's dis-



course – to subvert and undermine mainstream discourses including dress and style, music, dancing, art and design and social behaviour (Hebdige, 1979) – was reappropriated by the boys as a means to negotiate their lives at school. As Willis (1990) suggests, young people do not simply replicate discourses but actively and creatively use them to give meaning to and within their own social milieu.

When Peter conducted the first part of the research, to put his records into meaningful piles, he put all his Punk records in a pile that he called ‘unlikely to play again but hold strong memories’. Peter’s Punk public schoolboy character was an important identity that allowed him to negotiate his own crisis of identity during his teenage years but is no longer relevant to his current identity project.

### ‘Pump up the volume’

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to discern how the impact of one identity is managed through the simultaneous adoption of another. This is what Peter did, but the difference between his case and this case is that Peter had little choice in being a posh public schoolboy – others assigned him that identity. Here Fred has made various choices and we see how he manages the conflicting demands of the choices he has made.

Fred, like Peter, came from a comfortably middle to upper-middle class family background. An ideological setting – the storyteller’s beliefs and values – pervaded Fred’s narrative of consumption, which to a lesser extent also pervaded the three other narratives. He was aware of the privilege and opportunity that had been afforded to him by his social position. He had been socialized, by his high-achieving father and school, to make the most of these opportunities. He had internalized these family and socially derived expectations and experiences into his ongoing self-project. This was a response by Fred to a pivotal moment for him and his family, one that occurred in his early teens: the death of his sister:

I definitely was going down the rebellious route. What happened with my sister, it was one thing I am not going to do . . . making my parents feel any worse about. . .making them feel . . .they’ve got enough s\*\*t going on in their lives, they didn’t need me to f\*\*k up the exams, giving them grief. That definitely brought me right back on the rails again. I was definitely going down the line of partying hard . . .

From about this moment on Fred’s narrative revealed how he was torn between writing his own story and reproducing the story that had been written for him by his family, and the narratives into which he was socialized and had internalized. His imagos were either conservative conformers or creative non-conformists and it was the centrality of music in Fred’s life that allowed him to balance the two. This is amply demonstrated during a period in the early 1990s.

After qualifying as an accountant and taking some time off to go travelling, Fred went to work for a leading television company. Fred had become a businessman and in the process was delivering on one of the expectations that he had internalized – to be ‘successful’, with success defined in terms of having a reputable career. He also wanted to deliver on another; he wanted to settle down and have children,



but his partner at the time was not ready to settle down and they split up. This failure to reproduce a desired identity was a source of anxiety and insecurity that he ameliorated by reinventing himself as a weekend clubber.

Fred has hundreds of dance records and CDs from this phase of his life. He also became a DJ and invested in a pair of Technic turntables, widely recognized by the DJing cognoscenti to be *the* turntables to have. In the following passage from his narrative of consumption this management of conflicting trajectories of identity is amply demonstrated. The conformer/non-conformer duality is tangible as he recounts his experience of consuming the raver's drug of choice, Ecstasy. The narrative construction of reality process is recounted as an id versus super-ego battle:

I think this is probably the most direct link in my life between music and drugs, which was taking Ecstasy and getting into the whole house music thing. It was definitely something that changed my life, for a period. It was a period of my life when, when I'd just split up [with his girlfriend] and it was all a bit traumatic really. But what I find with the whole E thing was I enjoyed the friendliness of the scene and made a lot of good friends through it. I found the drug itself was very uplifting and it was just this whole new world, which I hadn't really explored before . . . and it was great . . . I found I really enjoyed the music. I found going to parties all night and talking to people I'd never met in a very friendly and non-aggressive way, was fantastic. And, that slight sense of underground hipness going along which was good . . . those days are behind me now. I think having kids and stuff I have to turn my back on all that, I'm not very interested in it now, although I like going clubbing but basically taking Es, I'm not into any more. It does f\*\*k you up and I think as soon as you get older you, as with all these things we get a little bit long in the tooth. I don't do that drug stuff any more 'cos I think it does your head in a bit too much . . . it's strong medicine, strong medicine. But it has given me some of the most outrageously happy moments, I mean just, in a euphoric sense, I mean the most euphoric moments, actually that's the right word, not happiness necessarily in a deeper sense. Hugely euphoric, the first time I took Ecstasy the whole world changed, and I think it takes you several years afterwards to make you realize that the world is exactly the same and actually what you've done is taken some mind expanding drug that's made you think it's all different. But, I do think that the Ecstasy thing, I mean people do get killed by it, and . . . you know I think it does cause depression and things, so it's said. But I think it's a fantastically healthy thing, 'cos there's clubs. . . the atmosphere at them is very special and, at parties on it and talking on it and stuff. But you know . . . this is definitely drug music.

At this stage in his life Fred is being or living an archetypal postmodern lifestyle, comfortable with the juxtaposition of two apparently contradictory selves and the different social practices associated with each self. On the one hand, by day or during the week, he is being the sensible, designer-suited, Sony laptop-carrying businessman defined by his work, while at night or at the weekend he becomes the 'E'd up' clubber, defined by his choice of leisure pursuit (see Goulding et al., 2002).

Fred pursued this lifestyle for about two years and by his own account had a great time but eventually this hedonistic lifestyle proved inauthentic. What he really wanted was to settle down and have children, to reproduce a desired identity – father, husband. At a friend's wedding, he met up again with his ex-partner and they got back together, as she had changed her mind about having children. Fred had rejected a post-modern lifestyle in favour of an updated modern one. The power and influence of internalized family, social and cultural narratives and their



concomitant identities appear safer, more likely to promote ontological security – a stability in one’s sense of self across time – and reduce anxiety, than identities he had authored himself. In this example we can see that at first, Fred attempted a synthesizing solution (Ahuvia, 2005), that is, he managed the demands of two conflicting identities (businessman and singleton) by assuming a third (raver) but in the end resorted to a demarcating solution by disinvesting in one (raver) in favour of another (husband, father).

### ‘Do you wanna be in my gang?’

As we saw with Paul and Helen, people are most susceptible to peer influence and pressure during their teenage and early adult years, a time when they flirt with many potential selves. Some of these will become identities that people fail to assimilate into their ongoing self-projects. Consumption-based documentary evidence of these flirtations is likely to be rudimentary at best.

In Sophie’s narrative we do see this process demonstrated. Sophie too comes from a very comfortable background. The turning point in her life was when she went to university. Sophie embraced the freedom and opportunity that accompanied leaving home and going to university; she embraced the fact that she could now write her own story and leave behind, literally, the story that her parents had been writing for her. Her father, who wasn’t university educated, maintained she was ‘wasting her time’ going to university, despite having invested significant sums in her education up to then.

Sophie achieved this separation partly through the consumption of music, symbolized in her record collection. The music she was buying, the music she was going to see performed live and the music that she went dancing to facilitated social interaction: meeting lots of people, from social backgrounds other than her own. Sophie’s experience at university is another demonstration of how social groups get to know each other through shared cultural activity and the social symbolic role of music. Her experience also corresponds with Ahuvia’s (2005) notion of demarcating solutions. Here an identity, the person Sophie wants to become, is invested in, while the identity tied to the baggage of her social background is disinvested in and left behind:

So music was basically important in terms of . . .

Meeting people . . . The more you got to know people you would buy common records, like with The Smiths. We all had this Smiths euphoria and we all went out and bought The Smiths new single, and everyone was doing the same sort of thing.

When she conducted the first phase of the research – putting her collection into meaningful piles – her largest pile of records came from her university days.

Next pile is really university, where it appears I’ve bought the most records and probably made the most change in what records I was buying, and probably the most influenced by what records I’ve bought, by friends, and the media and fashion. I have subdivided this one ’cos it’s rather huge. So I’d say the first part of it would be just all Indie music and buying ’cos I liked it but also probably because it was, it was fashionable too. Things like The Smiths, New Order,



Tracy Thorn, Aztec Camera, Echo and the Bunnymen. I mean all stuff I would happily listen to today but I do think it was a lot what other people were listening to too, and you listened to what your friends were listening to ingratiate yourself don't you. Then the second part of my university ones would I say be more . . . well I'm not really sure . . . I'd say it was a peer pressure group really. More political. It's not really. I'm just gonna call it peer pressure and you can call it what you want. I feel it's like, it's records that I bought that I probably didn't necessarily like very much but felt I had to, whereas in the first section, the Indie music, I did, I do and still do really like a lot of those records and, particularly male, jingly-jangly guitars, I've always liked that sort of music. In this section I'd say you know my buying of Aswad and Misty and Roots and Malcolm X and things like that – records that I would never to this day, ever listen to 'cos I don't really, I'm not really into reggae music but I bought it 'cos people were, like the druggy lot.

Some of the music that Sophie consumed she actually liked, and still likes, but she highlights what she calls 'political stuff' including music that she associated with the 'druggy lot', a group of people that were on the periphery of her social circle. This group of people liked listening to reggae. For Sophie though, reggae's discourse and its expression of black cultural and economic disenfranchisement, its opposition to and rejection of colonial and capitalist attitudes – 'mash down Babylon' – and its espousal of the pleasures of smoking marijuana, meant little to her.

These records symbolize a false identity and an identity that beyond the purchase of a few reggae records, she did little to invest in. By her own admission she rarely listened to the records then, and certainly does not now. From a psychological perspective Sophie was experiencing the notion of false self-behaviour (Harter, 1997). In this view, the false self is a personal construct that has social origins, but 'it feels foreign' (Harter, 1997: 88). In trying to fit in Sophie was engaging in consumption practices determined largely by the group that were, with hindsight, inconsistent with who she was.

## Discussion

Clearly, for our participants their old records acted as tangible documents of their lives that facilitated the construction of their life histories enabling an assessment of the development of their identities-in-process. We see that although we can have some choice in who we may want to be, we must recognize that not all identities are readily or equally available to all, regardless of how desired they may be. Moreover, because identities are socially meaningful categories, some identities and the symbolic meanings associated with their reproduction will be difficult to negotiate or even non-negotiable – it was very difficult for Sophie to renegotiate her physical body, for example. What also emerges is a sense that people are constantly negotiating competing and conflicting trajectories of identities.

Identities as discursive constructions are sites for the operation and effect of power (Foucault, 1982). We can see these effects as positive, facilitating the care of the self (Helen, Peter and Fred), and as disempowering and disciplining – a potential threat to ontological security (Sophie). As far as living in a consumer culture is concerned these observations raise difficult (and perhaps unanswerable) moral



questions concerning the discourses that it promulgates and the consumption practices that it supports. Sophie ultimately grew out of her teenage and early adult anxieties over her body image but some two-and-a-half decades later, women as young as eighteen are having plastic surgery in an attempt to 'be who they want to be'. In our view such consumption practices are anything but empowering when pursued for purely narcissistic, cosmetic purposes.

What emerged most clearly from the data were the structuring influences of what we have called narratives of socialization – the stories and expectations we are socialized into and that reflect our relative social position. These internalized narratives prove very significant and powerful in influencing ongoing identity projects. Paul Willis (1977) once asked 'Why do working class kids end up getting working class jobs?' and in a similar vein we can suggest the same is true for our participants – unsurprisingly, middle class people end up reproducing middle class values and identities. However, Willis (1977) argued that the lads he studied chose to be working class and actively and creatively rejected the opportunities afforded to them for social advancement. But this resistance, manifested in their rejection of school, merely served to reproduce their relative class position. Our participants similarly reproduced their class position but it appears less of an active choice and more of a practical logic that required some strategizing and improvisation along the way. Certainly for Fred, and to a lesser extent Paul, there was a significant pressure to do 'the right thing' and to deliver on internalized narratives of socialization that for a time were a source of anxiety and stress.

Through the lens of the narrative perspective adopted in this paper and our use of past consumption as a site through which to explore issues of identity, we suggest that perhaps consumer researchers have overemphasized the agentic possibilities of identity construction through consumption. As our data suggest, narratives of socialization, as vehicles through which the structuring influence of family and class exert themselves, are important constraints on identity projects realized through consumption.

Furthermore, we also detect the creeping aggrandizement of consumption's role and significance more generally in people's lives. Warde (2005: 137) argues that 'consumption is not itself a practice but is, rather, a moment in almost every practice'. Further, he contends that while we as consumer researchers (or psychologists, sociologists or anthropologists for that matter) think people – the objects of our inquiries – are consuming (e.g. see Holbrook's (1995) mini treatise on the subject), they themselves often understand many of their so-called consumption practices as having fun, or eating, or drinking, or driving, or going to the cinema, or surfing, or anything but consuming or forms of consumption. Thus Warde (2005) makes a distinction between this type of consumption as a dispersed practice and integrated practices like shopping when people do see themselves as consuming consumers.

This distinction is conceptually useful as it allows us to get to the heart of why we suggest consumer researchers are guilty of overegging the consumption cake. Of course, consumption, as both integrated and dispersed practice, is central to contemporary political economy and the successful operation of advanced indus-





trialized societies (see Shankar et al., 2006). From our data, however, we suggest that when consumption is seen as a dispersed practice it becomes merely a means to a more important end – the facilitation of social relations (Cova, 1997). Identity is an inherently social construct, with identity projects realized through social interaction and validation. It is in and through being together and doing things together, social practices that a group forms, that provides a basis for identification, as much of our data demonstrated. We therefore suggest that while consumption can be liberatory and empowering through enabling symbolic, self-expressivist, communicative acts, when consumption is conceived of as a social act constituted in social practice, it is not the sine qua non of contemporary social life, merely a facilitator of what are social relationships.

## Reflections on the ‘thingy-ness’ of records

All studies that look into the relationship between consumption and identity are implicitly underpinned by a theory of materiality and the role of objects in subject formation (see Borgerson, 2005). In this final section, we reflect (admittedly through rose-tinted spectacles) on Borgerson’s (2005) lament that consumer researchers have by and large ignored theories of materiality. Moreover, because of the recent changes in music production, distribution and consumption, we highlight a number of interesting avenues for further research that could further address her concerns.

Since we started this research, we have seen a revolution in the recorded music industry. None of the people involved, researchers or participants, had ever heard of mp3 files, let alone owned an iPod or downloaded tracks from the internet. We were all brought up on vinyl, make-your-own-cassettes and then CDs. As some of our data showed, buying the latest eagerly awaited release from a favourite band was a much anticipated social event, functioning as a form of within-group capital, helping emergent social groups to coalesce around shared, valued activities. Now, at the touch of a button, a digital file is stored in your music library and we could reasonably ask ‘where’s the fun in that?’

This research was only possible because our participants still had their old records and this ‘thingy-ness’ or tangibility facilitated the realization of past memories, enabling them to recount their stories so that we were able to trace the development of their identities. The social philosopher Hannah Arendt (1998 [1958]) characterizes human beings as *Homo faber*. She suggests that our ability to make things, the durability of the objects we make and our subsequent interaction with those objects is a fundamental aspect of human life. Objects, for Arendt, represent and stabilize human life. She suggests that, ‘against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world [*sic*]’ (Arendt, 1998[1958]: 137). In her view, then, the inevitable change that people experience over the course of their lives is ameliorated through their relationship to objects that fix their identity, with subsequent interaction with those objects enabling identities to be retrieved.



More recently, Miller's (1987) post-Hegelian analysis of material culture drew a similar conclusion: namely the co-constitutive relationship between subjects and objects. This means that there is no subject outside of a relationship with and to objects. Significantly for Miller (1987: 180) 'the subject continually externalizes outwards producing forms or attaching itself to the structures through which form may be created'. For both Miller and Arendt then, form can be but is not limited to material culture. However, while Arendt is clear about tangibility of objects, we could reasonably suggest that our experience, perception and embodied reaction to recorded music is similar, regardless of whether the object is material – a record or CD – or immaterial – an mp3 file. Furthermore, social relations are facilitated through the sharing of music, material and digital (see Giesler, 2006)

The material/immaterial divide, like so many binary opposites, represents an intractable philosophical question, but it can be considered an empirical question too. Clearly for our participants they were able to retrieve their identities and co-construct their subjectivities in relation to, with and through their old records. In this light, our research offers a reflective account of consumer identity projects with objects active in subject formation that, in turn, highlight the constraints on the agency of subjects – what Borgerson (2005: 442) has lyrically called a 'complex dance' between subjects and objects that 'form and change each other over time'. The question is, though, to what extent was this insight facilitated because of the actual 'thingy-ness' of the records? With the progressive dematerialization of recorded music – from vinyl to CDs and finally to mp3 files – how, if at all, does the immateriality of music affect our relationship with it, and what can it possibly do to us or for us? Will it be possible to conduct a replication study in 25 years' time using a current teenager's iPod? Are we more likely to delete from our iPod or hard drive a song, or album, or artist that we consider no longer 'me' than we were to get rid of old records that we no longer liked? Equally, what we must recognize is that while music has become 'digi-immaterialized', it still relies on a tangible base for its reproduction – the iPod, for example. Perhaps then, the 'thingy-ness' of records in this study will be usurped in future studies by the 'thingy-ness' of iPods that will still act as conduits through which the meanings symbolized in the stored music are realized.

Of course, a by-product and perhaps even a consequence of the dematerialization of recorded music has been a concurrent upsurge in people experiencing the performance of music live. Indeed, the change has been so marked that the business models of the music industry are being rewritten. Whereas there was once money to be made in records and CDs, now money is made from live concerts, merchandizing and licensing rights. Perhaps then, technological changes have not changed the 'real' business of music – how its consumption brings people together: its linking value.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to our four participants who gave of their time so freely and to the three reviewers for their helpful comments in the preparation of this paper.



## Notes

1. A 'spotty Herbert' is a euphemism for an acne-covered, angst-ridden, teenage boy.
2. A 'tossler' is a slang word meaning an unpleasant or contemptible person.
3. DMs are Doc Martin shoes. Although a mainstream shoe brand now, in the 1970s they were considered working class shoes, and were worn by Punks and Skinheads.

## References

- Ahuvia, A. (2005) 'Beyond the Extended Self: Loved Objects and Consumers' Identity Narratives', *Journal of Consumer Research* 32(June): 171–84.
- Arendt, H. (1998[1958]) *The Human Condition*. Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press.
- Arnould, E.J. and Thompson, C.J. (2005) 'Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research', *Journal of Consumer Research* 31(March): 868–82.
- Atkinson, R. (1998) *The Life Story Interview*. London: Sage.
- Bauman, Z. (2001) *The Individualized Society*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Belk, R.W. (1988) 'Possessions and the Extended Self', *Journal of Consumer Research* 15(September): 139–68.
- Bordo, S. (1997) 'Normalisation and Resistance in the Era of the Image', in S. Kemp and J. Squires (eds) *Feminisms*, pp. 451–5. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Borgerson, J. (2005) 'Materiality, Agency and the Constitution of Consuming Subjects: Insights for Consumer Research', *Advances in Consumer Research* 32: 439–43.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, P. (1985) 'The Genesis of the Concepts of *Habitus* and of *Field*', *Sociocriticism* 2: 11–18.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Cova, B. (1997) 'Community and Consumption: Towards a Definition of the "Linking Value" of Product or Services', *European Journal of Marketing* 31(3/4): 297–316.
- Coward, R. (1997) 'Slim and Sexy: Modern Woman's Holy Grail', in S. Kemp and J. Squires (eds) *Feminisms*, pp. 358–62.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981) *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- De Nora, T. (1999) 'Music as a Technology of Self', *Poetics* 27: 31–56.
- Denzin, N.K. (1998) 'The Art and Politics of Interpretation', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds) *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, pp. 313–44. London: Sage.
- Dittmar, H. (1992) *The Social Psychology of Material Possessions*. Hemel Hempstead: St Martin's Press.
- Elliott, R. and Wattanasuwan, K. (1998) 'Brands as Symbolic Resources for the Construction of Identity', *International Journal of Advertising* 17: 131–44.
- Firat, A.F. and Venkatesh, A. (1995) 'Liberatory Postmodernism and the Reenchantment of Consumption', *Journal of Consumer Research* 22(December): 239–67.
- Foucault, M. (1982) 'The Subject and Power', in H. L. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds) *Michel Foucault Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, pp. 208–26. Brighton: Harvester Press.



- Frith, S. (1988) *Music for Pleasure: Essays in the Sociology of Rock*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Frith, S. (1996a) 'Music and Identity', in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, pp. 108–27.
- Frith, S. (1996b) *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1991) *Modernity and Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giesler, M. (2006) 'Consumer Gift Systems', *Journal of Consumer Research* 33(September): 283–90.
- Goulding, C., Shankar, A. and Elliott, C. (2002) 'Working Weeks, Rave Weekends: Identity Fragmentation and the Emergence of New Communities', *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 5(4): 261–84.
- Hall, S. (1996) 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?' in S. Hall and P. du Gay (eds) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, pp. 1–17. London: Sage.
- Hargreaves, D.J. and North, A.C. (1999) 'The Functions of Music in Everyday Life: Redefining the Social in Music Psychology', *Psychology of Music* 27: 71–83.
- Harter, S. (1997) 'The Personal Self in Social Context: Barriers to Authenticity', in R. D. Ashmore and L. Jussim (eds) *Self and Identity: Fundamental Issues*, pp. 81–105. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hebdige, D. (1979) *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.
- Hill, R.P. (1991) 'Homeless Women, Special Possessions, and the Meaning of "Home": An Ethnographic Case Study', *Journal of Consumer Research* 18(December): 303–21.
- Holbrook, M. (1995) *Consumer Research: Introspective Essays on the Subject of Consumption*. London: Sage.
- Holt, D.B. and Thompson, C.J. (2004) 'Man-of-action Heroes: The Pursuit of Heroic Masculinity in Everyday Consumption', *Journal of Consumer Research* 31(September): 425–40.
- Jenkins, R. (1996) *Social Identity*. London: Routledge.
- Kellner, D. (1992) 'Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities', in Lash, S. and Friedman, J. (eds.) *Modernity and Identity*: pp. 140–56. Oxford: Blackwell.
- McCracken, G. (1988) *The Long Interview*. London: Sage.
- Markus, H. and Nurius, P. (1986) 'Possible Selves', *American Psychologist* 41(9): 954–69.
- Miller, D. (1987) *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Plummer, K. (2001) *Documents of Life: 2*. London: Sage.
- Sartre, J-P. (1948) *Existentialism and Humanism*. London: Methuen.
- Sartre, J-P. (2000) *Being and Nothingness*. London: Routledge.
- Shankar, A., Elliott, R. and Goulding, C. (2001) 'Understanding Consumption: Contributions from a Narrative Perspective', *Journal of Marketing Management* 17: 429–53.
- Shankar, A., Whittaker, J. and Fitchett, J. (2006) 'Heaven Knows I'm Miserable now', *Marketing Theory* 6(4): 485–505.
- Thompson, C.J. and Hirschman, E.C. (1995) 'Understanding the Socialized Body: A Poststructuralist Analysis of Consumers' Self-conceptions, Body Images, and Self-care Practices', *Journal of Consumer Research* 22(September): 139–53.
- Thornton, S. (1995) *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Warde, A. (2005) 'Consumption and Theories of Practice', *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5(2): 131–53.



- Wilk, R.R. (1997) 'A Critique of Desire: Distaste and Dislike in Consumer Behaviour', *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 1(2): 175–96.
- Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to Labour: How Working-class Kids Get Working-class Jobs*. Farnborough: Saxon Dale.
- Willis, P. (1990) *Common Culture*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

**Avi Shankar** is Senior Lecturer in Marketing and Consumer Research and Director of the Centre for Research in Advertising and Consumption in the School of Management at the University of Bath. Previously he worked with his two co-authors at the University of Exeter, where this research was conceived and conducted. His research interests focus on critiques of contemporary consumer culture, the conceptualization of illicit pleasure and its management through marketplace cultures, and studies of identity and consumption. He recently co-edited the groundbreaking, bestseller *Consumer Tribes*. He can be contacted at the School of Management, University of Bath, Bath BA2 7AY. [email: A.Shankar@bath.ac.uk]

**Richard Elliott** is Dean and Professor of Marketing and Consumer Research in the School of Management at the University of Bath, and a Fellow of St. Anne's College, Oxford. He is a visiting professor at SDA Bocconi Milan, Thammasat University Bangkok, Helsinki University of Technology and Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Previously he was the first person to be appointed to a Readership in Marketing at the University of Oxford and was a Deputy Director of the Saïd Business School. He worked for 12 years in brand management with a number of US multinationals and as an Account Director at an international advertising agency.

**James A. Fitchett** is Reader in Marketing and Consumer Research at the University of Leicester Management Centre, UK. He applies social and cultural theory to address current topics in marketing theory and consumer research, with recent work examining issues of consumer surveillance and aspects of consumer discourse. His work has been published in, amongst others, *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Business Ethics: A European Review*, *British Journal of Management* and *Marketing Theory*. He is co-editor of the *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*.